

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 436 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. COLLINS. Seeing no one seeking recognition, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

REOPENING SCHOOLS

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, I know that some of my colleagues have been talking about schools, getting children back to school, getting schools reopened. Indeed, in Tennessee, that is a topic that has received a good bit of conversation. All but two of our school systems have been open and working this entire school year, and those other two systems have recently reopened since the first of the year. Our school superintendents, our directors of school, our parents, our teachers, and the students have all worked together as a team—a solid, cohesive team—to make this happen.

I think there are two main points that we have seen, and as we are holding meetings with our county elected officials and city officials and as they talk about the efforts that they have made in getting children back into the classroom, we hear a lot about one point. That is that our Governor, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee, made it clear that the school districts would be responsible for the "how" they were going to open and the "when" they would be reopening. I really thank him for listening and recognizing that local officials and individuals in the community really do know what is best for their school districts and their students.

The second point is that these plans didn't just drop out of the sky. As I said, this has been a team effort in our communities, and it has happened because there was this agreement between the administrators and the parents and the teachers that they were going to make decisions that were going to be best for the children. So when you look at Tennessee and how they have approached this—indeed, the schools reopening and how they proceeded—it was done with the children in mind.

Last week, I had the privilege of speaking with school administrators from West Tennessee, who played a part in developing their own reopening plans. I cannot adequately describe to you with the time that we have on the floor today the amount of work and the thoughtfulness that they put into these schedules, from health and safety con-

siderations, to scheduling changes, to the complicated logistics of social distancing and cramped classrooms. They thought it all through by walking through the day and listening to what teachers and parents had to say as to how they would walk through this day.

They took the millions of dollars in CARES Act funding that the area received, and what did they do with that money? They invested in the best possible plan for these kids—no Federal mandate or sweeping litmus test required. They said: We are going to do what is right by these children.

Then, of course, they turned on the TV, and they saw that the Biden administration was busy walking back their own enthusiastic scientific guidance on safely reopening schools—walking it back—and they didn't have to flip too many channels to figure out why. Powerful teachers unions had taken their own stands in refusing to make a plan, in refusing to think things through, and in some cases in refusing to go to work at all—not doing what is best for the children but doing what was going to serve their interests first and, in their opinions, what would best serve their interests. That, I think, they will see were regrettable actions.

Educators in Tennessee were not just confused by what they saw; they were insulted because they knew exactly what was happening. On January 26, CDC officials released a study showing that, if we were careful, safe reopening was indeed possible. Administration officials touted that report as a light at the end of a very long COVID pandemic, but now, just a few weeks later, those same officials are defying their own experts, insisting that safe reopening can only happen if Congress approves additional funding contained in the Democrats' latest, untargeted spending bill.

Students in this country are suffering. They are lonely, they are bored, and many of them are struggling with clinical depression and anxiety. Teen pregnancy, teen alcohol, and suicide rates are rising. Children need to be in in-person school.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has repeatedly stated—bear in mind, this isn't something that I am saying; it isn't something that is partisan; it is the American Academy of Pediatrics—that it is not only feasible but necessary for students to be back in school, back in the classroom, back to seeing their friends, back to participating in extracurricular activities and sports.

I would ask my colleagues across the aisle to keep this in mind when they hear from so-called stakeholders who are willing to hold a child's mental health hostage in exchange for a political win that will serve their power and their purposes and not that of the child's. They might have powerful voices in the cable news circuit, but those sound bites will provide you no cover back home with the teachers and

administrators who have rolled up their sleeves, have gotten to work, and have figured out a way to get schools open for the children.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, outrage—that is what American families should be feeling right now, and many are. We are seeing President Biden and the Democrats support opening the border, the southern border, for illegal immigrants while bowing to political pressure and keeping many of our Nation's schools closed for our students—opening the southern border for illegal immigrants, closing our Nation's schools for our students.

Schools across the Nation remain closed to in-person instruction largely due to teachers unions and their influence on many of our local and Federal leaders on the other side of the aisle—all, unfortunately, to the detriment of the education and the health of our students.

In States and localities where schools remain closed, America's youngest and brightest minds are posed with challenges that generations before have never dealt with. Children are continuing to cope with the unprecedented hardship of virtual classrooms, a lack of social interaction with their peers, and other impediments to their education. But this isn't because of the pandemic itself; it is because President Biden, the Democrats, and local leaders have caved to the political pressures of teachers unions and have kept many classrooms closed and students at home despite what the available science and other experts are telling us. The science is clear: Schools are not major COVID-19 spreading grounds, and younger students are a low-risk group. Studies indicate that students across the country are months behind where they should be academically.

The hardships our students face go beyond academics because the mental and physical health of children has also taken a toll. We are seeing depression and anxiety rates skyrocket among our young people. I was on a call today, a Zoom call, with several elementary school principals in Montana, hearing their firsthand, frankly, tragic accounts of what is happening with the mental health of our students in elementary school and hearing about elementary school students assaulting teachers. A whole year without full-time, in-person learning has done irreparable damage. The status quo is truly devastating to many of our students. Despite this—despite the science, despite the overwhelming data—schools across the country, in many parts of our country, remain closed.

Frankly, it is unacceptable that many of my colleagues across the aisle and the Biden administration are standing by while this happens to our students across our country. They have chosen to play politics with our Nation's students instead of ensuring that

our children are getting the very best education possible, which is full-time, in-person instruction. They are intent on jamming through this partisan \$1.9 trillion COVID package, which does include billions of dollars for schools.

Incidentally, in working together, we have passed five bipartisan COVID relief packages. Yes, it is harder to work in a bipartisan fashion, but that is why we were sent back here to Washington—to work together. Yet President Biden and the Democrats are saying: We are going to do this one alone. It is going to be their way or the high-way.

The sad reality is, the more the American people hear what is in this \$1.9 trillion package, the more they are not going to like it. Most of the money in this package is not to be spent now. In fact, 95 percent of it will be spent over the next 7 years, after the crisis. We should not use this COVID crisis as a liberal wish list of items here wherein 95 percent of it gets spent in the out-years. How does this help our students and our schools now? The answer is, it doesn't.

This is not how we solve the problems that our students are facing. Fortunately, there is a pretty simple solution. It is this: Listen to the experts. Listen to the science. Reopen our schools, and let's get our students back in the classroom.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TEXAS

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, we have had some bizarre weather in my State in the last week or so. We are still reeling from a deadly winter storm that hit all 254 counties in the State of Texas last week.

The snowstorm brought snow, ice, and prolonged subfreezing temperatures. We don't have temperatures below zero in Texas—or at least we haven't for a long, long time, but we did last week. As a result, it paralyzed much of our critical infrastructure, leaving millions without electricity, leaving them without heat, and leaving them without running water for days on end.

The good news is that power has now been restored for the vast majority of Texans, and cities are slowly lifting water boil notices as water filtration systems come back online.

But a number of families are still facing outages, and as we have seen during previous disasters, low-income and minority communities are the hardest hit. Our top priority is to restore power and clean water to every single Texan.

Throughout this episode—this tragedy, really—my staff and I have been in contact with local, State, and, of course, Federal officials to determine what kinds of things we can do to help and how we can mobilize resources as soon as possible. As recovery efforts continue in the coming days and weeks, I will continue to try to do that.

This is not unlike what we have to do periodically for hurricanes that seem to find their way to the State of Texas. But in this case we know that some of the problem was not an act of nature; it was a failure to anticipate these sub-freezing, subzero cold temperatures. So we have got to ask not only "What happened?" but "How can we prevent it from happening again in the future?"

As I said, we experience, from time to time, hurricanes, occasionally tornadoes and tropical storms or record-low temperatures, but we cannot allow our infrastructure to go offline for days on end.

I want to thank the countless Texans who supported each other during this crisis. There are those that have gone above and beyond the call of duty in their official capacities, whether it is as first responders, emergency dispatchers, utility and energy workers, healthcare workers—the list goes on and on.

But there are also the unsung heroes—those who invited neighbors into their homes, delivered hot meals to those in need, checked on an elderly neighbor, those who towed vehicles stuck in the snow, and so much more.

I just want to assure all of my constituents that we are in this together, and we will do everything we can not only to find out how this happened but what we can do to make sure it never happens again.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, on another matter, as you know, this week our Democratic colleagues in the House are continuing to take action on President Biden's relief bill, using the budget reconciliation process.

It is really not so much an issue in the House, where you can do anything you want, basically, with a majority vote. But if all goes their way, our Democratic colleagues will write a \$1.9 trillion check, funded by taxpayers—future taxpayers because it will be borrowed money—without the input of a single Republican in Congress, either in the House or in the Senate.

We know that there are 10 Republicans who went over to the White House, had a very pleasant meeting with President Biden, but were essentially told: My way or the highway. Any effort to try to come up with a bipartisan compromise was rejected.

Regardless of your political affiliation or views on this particular bill, that fact alone should trouble every single American. After all, there was no need for partisan maneuvering to pass a coronavirus relief bill last year. As a matter of fact, we passed five of them. All of them were signed into law with overwhelming bipartisan support. No bill received fewer than 90 votes here in the Senate. One even passed unanimously.

Of course, the reason for the widespread support wasn't because Members thought these relief packages were perfect. There were things I would have changed if I had had a chance, and I am

sure others would have made other changes.

But each bill was a clear response to the crisis at hand and free from any unrelated partisan priorities. In other words, it was focused on COVID-19 relief.

Suffice it to say that the same cannot be said about this latest piece of legislation, this \$1.9 trillion bill being rammed through Congress by our Democratic colleagues.

Overall, I have three concerns with this legislation. First, it would dramatically overspend in areas that aren't even in need of additional funding.

In the early days of the pandemic, we had no real expectation about how long the crisis would last or how big a blow it would deal to our economy. After the CARES Act was signed into law in March, late March, it made sense to hit the pause button so we could see how what we did was working—what was working well and what was not working so well. Where was more assistance needed? Where was it sufficient?

These needs became obvious pretty quickly. One example was the Paycheck Protection Program. Within 2 weeks of passage of \$350 billion worth of relief, it ran dry—in 2 weeks. So we quickly came together on a bipartisan basis to replenish the fund with additional money, and we did so again at the end of the year.

This sort of bipartisan, step-by-step approach is the most effective way to get funding where it is needed without wasting money on already well-funded programs.

But, unfortunately, our friends across the aisle didn't apply that same logic to this \$1.9 trillion piece of legislation, which sends hundreds of billions of dollars to areas that are nowhere near running out of money.

One example is public education. So far, Congress has provided more than \$110 billion to support K-12 education, including \$68 billion in the relief bill passed just in December. Schools in Texas have used this money to update their ventilation systems, purchase masks and personal protective equipment, and make other investments in classroom safety. But the vast majority of the funding that was provided in December is still waiting to be used. In other words, there is no current need for any more money from Congress.

As a matter of fact, as of February 9, States have spent just under \$5 billion of the \$68 billion we have already provided for K-12 education. They have spent just \$5 billion out of the \$68 billion.

As a reminder, in December, the CDC—the Centers for Disease Control—estimated schools would need only about \$22 billion to reopen safely, meaning there is already more than enough money to support safe school reopenings. But that data-driven estimate from the experts doesn't seem to matter to our Democratic colleagues or the administration, who are preparing